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The Effect of Sam Brownback's Gubernatorial Tenure on Kansan Opinion of Supply-Side Economics

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Abstract

Governor Brownback's keystone policy was always based in his economics; as governor, he was a proponent of supply-side economics, the same kind favored by Ronald Reagan. This theory of economics purports that the best way to grow an economy is by lowering taxes and decreasing regulation, and letting this extra wealth 'trickle down' from the top of the economy to the bottom. By the end of Brownback's terms, in our experience as Kansans, many moderate Republicans were questioning the efficacy of this policy. With this in mind, we wanted to examine statistics related to this and see whether the trust of moderate republicans in this traditional conservative economic theory was lessened by Brownback's gubernatorial tenure, or whether the shift in political landscape that led to Laura Kelly's election stemmed from another factor.

Methods

Our primary tool of analysis was statistical comparison. We used SPSS software on the data sets provided by the Docking Institute to cross-tabulate data from 2011-2018. We focused our analysis on three main factors which were recurring in the survey data: party self-affiliation, opinion of the Kansas economy, and opinion of Brownback's performance as governor. We produced crosstabs illustrating the interaction of each of these categories for all years in between 2011 and 2018, and then observed trends in this data. From there, we considered whether the trends observed supported our hypothesis and drew conclusions.

Results

From the beginning of the years studied to the end, a fairly consistent drop in the popularity of Governor Brownback can be observed. As show in Figures 1 and 2, the popularity of Brownback sank a drastically among both political parties. By contrast, opinion of the economy did not vary significantly between the beginning and end of the period studied. From Figures 3 and 4 it can be observed that the ratio of opinions on the economy varied little, with most placing it as either 'good' or 'fair'. It can also be seen that on both ends of Brownback's gubernatorial tenure, those leaning Democratic tended to rate the economy as worse, and those leaning Republican tended to rate the economy as better.

Conclusions

Based on the data collected, it is unclear whether Brownback's emphasis on supply-side economics is what led to his unpopularity. Given the fact that his popularity decreased drastically but that opinion of the economy did not vary significantly, it may be that other policies of Brownback produced this unpopularity among both parties.

One difficulty we faced was in the non-uniform nature of the survey data we had access to. Changes in terminology over the years ("moderately satisfied" to "somewhat satisfied", etc.) make this data slightly less effective in its year-to-year comparison.

We recommend more research be done on this topic to determine more clearly what leads to the popularity of public policy.

Do You Consider Yourself a....										Do You Consider Yourself a....									
Fig.1 -2011		Strong Rep	Rep	Ind Leaning Rep	Ind	Ind Leaning Dem	Dem	Strong Dem	Total	Fig.3 -2011		Strong Rep	Rep	Ind Leaning Rep	Ind	Ind Leaning Dem	Dem	Strong Dem	Total
Performance of Gov. Brownback	Very Satisfied	65	12	20	21	7	3	6	134	Rate Kansas Economy	Excellent	6	0	1	0	1	0	1	9
	Somewhat Satisfied	70	40	58	45	21	12	25	271		Very Good	13	9	11	13	8	4	5	63
	Neutral	35	17	32	51	20	22	17	194		Good	76	36	59	54	33	15	31	304
	Dissatisfied	14	18	23	71	58	27	70	281		Fair	71	33	56	72	42	30	52	356
											Poor	23	9	8	46	21	17	22	146
											Very Poor	4	3	3	12	2	2	8	34
Total		184	87	133	188	106	64	118	880	Total		193	90	138	197	107	68	119	912
Do You Consider Yourself a....										Do You Consider Yourself a....									
Fig.2 -2018		Strong Rep	Rep	Ind Leaning Rep	Ind	Ind Leaning Dem	Dem	Strong Dem	Total	Fig.4 -2018		Strong Rep	Rep	Ind Leaning Rep	Ind	Ind Leaning Dem	Dem	Strong Dem	Total
Performance of Gov. Brownback	Very Satisfied	14	2	6	7	0	0	0	29	Rate Kansas Economy	Excellent	3	0	2	2	1	0	0	8
	Somewhat Satisfied	28	6	12	7	1	0	1	55		Very Good	22	3	6	2	2	0	3	38
	Neutral	10	5	8	7	1	0	0	31		Good	42	16	25	30	15	5	16	149
	Dissatisfied	45	30	37	62	45	14	54	287		Fair	23	19	24	24	16	5	18	129
											Poor	8	4	5	19	11	4	15	66
Total		97	43	63	83	47	14	55	402	Total		100	44	64	82	46	14	55	405